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ABSTRACT

A major barrier to minority student participation in the Arizona State University teacher preparation program is the state-mandated requirement that all sections of the PreProfessional Skills Test (PPST) be passed before any teacher preparation courses can be taken. This paper describes the significant features of a minority recruitment/support program, which offers a proactive PPST support system. The program is moving toward becoming comprehensive and relies on vigorous proactive support. This paper describes the salient features of the program: (1) an intensive attempt to identify minority students who require the services of the PPST support system; (2) active recruiting of minority students education programs at community colleges, exceptional high school students; and (3) diagnostic testing of prospective students. Academic class offerings in reading, mathematics, and writing are described. Classes provide a large number of PSST-like problems and students are tested frequently to assist them in overcoming test anxiety. The outcomes and future modifications of the program are discussed. (JD)

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A MINORITY RECRUITMENT PROGRAM THROUGH A PROACTIVE PPST SUPPORT SYSTEM

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The College of Education at Arizona State University is attempting to increase the number of minority students in its Professional Teacher Preparation Program. A major barrier to minority student participation in the program is the State-mandated requirement that all sections of a basic skills (PreProfessional Skills Test, PPST) test be passed before any teacher preparation courses can be taken. The College has responded by implementing a minority recruitment/support program, which offers a proactive PPST support system. The objective of this paper is to describe the accomplishments of this approach.

Arizona State University, in a state with more than 25% minorities (predominantly Hispanics), is under a legislative mandate to increase the number of minorities from its present level of 4.9% to more than 15%. In addition, the College of Education receives pressure (from community minority groups and from the community's need for bilingual teachers) to increase its percentage of minorities from the present approximately 10%. Any College efforts, however, must consider the state-mandated basic skills test, which relatively few minority applicants pass. In particular, since the inception of the test in 1985, 409 Hispanics, 27 Blacks, and 153 Native Americans have taken the PPST in Arizona. Of these, only 38% of the Hispanics, 26% of the Blacks, and 10% of the Native Americans passed all three portions of the test on the first test occasion. When all retests to date are considered the number of passes increases to 54%, 41%, and 20%, respectively.

This admission test which denies access to those who fail also creates other difficulties: a) In a community that desperately needs bilingual teachers and teachers with bicultural sensitivity, numerous minority students capable of passing the test never take it, choosing other majors and settling instead for jobs that lack this requirement. b) Minority students who require multiple tests to pass are often resentful and angry with the University or the College of Education. c) Repeated failures undermine the confidence even of those students who eventually pass. d) The pattern of failure creates the public perception that minority students are less well qualified to be teachers than are others.

Description of the Intervention

Critical features of a proactive program: Three cycles of the support program have been completed with a fourth cycle scheduled for June, 1989. This paper describes the significant features of the

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program. Importantly, the program is moving toward becoming comprehensive and relies on vigorous proactive support.

Comprehensiveness

a) A full-time administrator is charged with a range of support activities; among these the PPST support program is given high priority.
b) A part-time recruiter/coordinator provides outreach to both on- and off-campus minority communities.
c) Students are recruited into a program of services, including advisement, assistance with admission procedures, logistical assistance, and financial aid.
d) Diagnostic testing to inform students of their preparedness for the test was instituted.
e) Special courses designed to "teach to the test" were created specifically for this group of students. (For the third cycle a completely new problem-solving curriculum was developed.)
f) An agreement with ASU's Financial Aid Office provides a very substantial increase in loan/scholarship monies for minority students.
g) Motivational workshops (test-taking, anxiety reducing) are occasional features of the program.

Proactive Outreach

Most records and verbal reports suggest that minority students receive effective communication about program matters far too late. For that reason, instead of waiting for students to contact us about problems, a series of outreach strategies have been adopted.

a) Through a variety of networking strategies the Office of Educational Services obtains multiple lists of and sources for names of minority/disadvantaged individuals.
b) The PPST Support Program is the centerpiece for the College of Education's minority recruitment effort. All minority students, identified from numerous sources, are contacted about this service.
c) All students contacted are queried about their need for each of the services available. The progress of each minority student in the pipeline (and where appropriate in the Professional Teacher Preparation Program) is tracked.
d) Students are contacted cyclically to update them on services available to them, to reinvite them to participate and to express interest and concern.

Detailed description: Minority student difficulties in coping with the basic skills test may result from any of a bewildering array of factors. Because students are diverse, the crucial barriers differ from student to student, but they must be dealt with if these students are to enter and successfully complete the Teacher Preparation Program. Some students require sustained assistance, others require less regular intervention. Because of the diversity, one must be prepared to provide a wide range of support services. We believe that program flexibility together with staff sensitivity and

persistence are responsible for the program's high level of success. On an almost daily basis we discern and implement ways of dealing with special problems.

Our first and most important task is to identify minority students who require our services. Some of the communities at which vigorous outreach has been directed include: a) directors of teacher-aide programs in the schools and their (often bilingual) teacher-aide staff; b) directors of teacher-aide programs at the community colleges and individuals in these programs; c) directors of Head Start programs and individuals in these programs; d) educational coordinators on the Indian Reservations; e) minority students (from any school) who have ever submitted PPST scores to Arizona State University; f) all minority students enrolled in the College of Education's Pre-Professional Program regardless of class level, or level of academic achievement (this latter point is critical because minority students with A-/B+ GPAs sometimes fail the basic skills test); g) minority students in education programs at community colleges; and h) some exceptional high school students.

Recruiter/coordinator activities: The recruiter/coordinator contacts many hundreds of students from these sources. Where individual names and telephone numbers or addresses are available, telephone or mail contacts (often repeated) are made. Where groups of students are identified, group orientations are provided for groups of individuals. In addition to contacting students from these sources, informing them about the services, and following up to assure attendance and satisfaction, the recruiter has a wide range of activities and responsibilities. Importantly, she serves as "mother confessor" and sounding board to students, instructors, and community individuals. Many minority students express considerable rage at their treatment by the system. Most have stories about being ignored, misadvised, or "shabbily treated." They are permitted to express their unhappiness, but are encouraged to "move on." The coordinator also assists students with logistical problems, such as registering for the test, and locating unfamiliar locations (such as class and test sites). She monitors and maintains staff and student enthusiasm for the program, and acts as an on-site problem solver.

Diagnostic testing: In the first two cycles of the support program students were required to take basic skills pretests and posttests to make evaluation possible. Students usually resisted taking these tests. During the third cycle, we began to offer our old "pretest" in a new guise. Now called a diagnostic test, and described as a service (and only incidentally required for all students taking our support classes) the diagnostic test has become the program's most popular element. These tests continue to be used for evaluative, diagnostic, and predictive purposes. Students are given clear, exact information on their likely performance, and are warmly, but realistically advised about their prospects with respect to the basic skills test. They are informed about the amount of time and work it will require for them to pass the test. Although some individuals must be told that it is likely to take semesters or years for them to become qualified, no students are discouraged from attempting to enter the program.

Academic classes: The academic class offerings have matured during the three cycles of the program. Two distinct class patterns have evolved: a) During the summer, classes are held three hours a day, five days a week for a month. b) During the school year, classes are held three hours a day, three days a week for two months. Classes are offered in reading, math, and writing. During the first two cycles instructors were required only: to gear their lessons specifically to the PPST, and to "coddle" the students. Like all students, ours are more likely to attend classes if they are happy and feel well-treated. Students evaluate the staff regularly.

In response to demands of staff and students, a specific PPST curriculum was developed for each class for the third cycle of the program. The standard curriculum materials developed for the third cycle of classes provides a large number of PPST-like problems and employs a problem-solving approach to all material. The curriculum requires that students be given regular tests. For example, in math they receive speeded PPST-like testing every day. In writing and reading, they receive regular although not daily testing.

Outcomes: How successful has this program been? We have begun to change ethnic minorities' view that the College of Education is indifferent toward its minority students. Although these efforts are not complete, we have begun to smooth the transition of minority students transferring into the College from the community colleges. They are informed about the College's requirements, and they are helped to meet those requirements. We contacted 125 students in our first cycle, 241 students in our second cycle, and 314 in our third cycle. These contacts are creating a network that brings increasing numbers of students to seek our services.

But, let us look squarely at our successes in helping students pass the Pre-Professional Skills Test. How well have we done? During our first cycle, for the students for whom we have complete data, average pretest math, reading and writing scores were 166, 164, and 164 respectively. With passing scores of 173, 172 and 174 for reading, math, and writing, respectively, we needed average increases of 7, 8, and 10 on these tests. We now know that on the average a single brief skills course cannot change scores that much. Students experienced increases of 2.9, 2.7, and 4.5, respectively. Thirty-six percent of takers passed reading, none passed math, and 27% passed writing. No student passed all sections of the test.

We returned to the drawing board. We changed math instructors, and recruited somewhat stronger students. During our second cycle, our pretest scores for reading, math and writing were 169, 166, and 170, respectively. This time we were an average of 4, 6, and 4 points from payoff. Students experienced increases of 1.3 in reading, 4.8 in math, and 3.0 in writing. Twenty percent of students passed reading, 42% passed math, 70% passed writing. Four students passed all sections of the test.

We have just completed our third cycle of classes. Although our criterion data for this cycle are not yet available, we have some evidence that our improved curriculum may be producing results! Eight students uncomfortable about waiting for the March 4th test,

took the January 28th test after only a few weeks of support. Of these students, three passed all sections of the test. Two students showed quite remarkable increases--12 points on a single test. Finally, although we do not know the scores for the March 4th test, we do know that for our third cycle our pretest scores for reading, math, and writing were 170, 166. and 170, respectively. This time we averaged 3, 6, and 4 points from payoff. Even if our new curriculum has no effect, an educated guess is that that 25% will pass reading, 40% will pass math and 70% writing.

We have done a number of things in this program. Willingness to retake the PPST test is lower for minorities than for nonminorities. We have increased minority persistence in taking the PPST test. We have begun to change students attitudes about the need for basic skills. We have made marked improvement in skills. These changes, however, do not occur for all students, and these statistics do not reflect students' persistence in the program. Fewer than 20% of those who are contacted utilize our services. Fewer than half the students who start the program in any particular cycle complete it. Over time though, many of these students return and make additional efforts.

Conclusions: The College of Education at Arizona State University, an institution reputed to be indifferent to its minority students, made an effort to "turn around" this perception through a comprehensive minority support system. Minority students' low pass rate on the PPST, the basic skills test, served as one of the major barriers to entrance of minorities into the program. The proactive support system translates this PPST issue into the cornerstone for recruitment, and enhancement of motivation and academic skills It has helped students pass the PPST test, to change their attitudes about themselves, and to have more positive feelings about the College and the University.

Importance: The prosperity of the University in a state where more than 25% of high-school age children are minorities depends on its ability to serve these young people. The career goals and the happiness of certification-seeking minority students depends on their entering the College of Education as first-class citizens. The role models available to the increasing percentages of minority students depends on these minority students completing their teacher certification. The present program is beginning to increase the number of well-qualified minority students eligible for admission to the Professional Teacher Preparation Program. Additional challenges will include providing appropriate mentoring, and facilitating their performance in Professional Teacher Preparation classes, and in their student teaching placements.

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